United Nations S/2009/378

Security Council

Distr.: General
22 July 2009

Original: English

Letter dated 20 July 2009 from the Permanent Representative of Mexico to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

In my capacity as Chairman of the Working Group of the Security Council on Children and Armed Conflict, I have the honour to submit a report on the activities of the Working Group since the submission of its last report on 11 July 2008.

I should be grateful if you would have this letter and the enclosed report issued as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Claude **Heller**

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Please recycle

Annual report on the activities of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, established pursuant to resolution 1612 (2005) (1 July 2008 to 30 June 2009)

I. Introduction

1. On 26 July 2005, the Security Council adopted resolution 1612 (2005) on children and armed conflict.

2. In paragraph 8 of the resolution, the Council decided to establish a working group of the Security Council to review the reports of the mechanism referred to in paragraph 3 of the resolution, to review progress in the development and implementation of the action plans mentioned in paragraph 7 of the resolution and to consider other relevant information presented to it. The Council decided further that the working group should:

(a) Make recommendations to the Council on possible measures to promote the protection of children affected by armed conflict, including through recommendations on appropriate mandates for peacekeeping missions and recommendations with respect to the parties to the conflict;

(b) Address requests, as appropriate, to other bodies within the United Nations system for action to support implementation of the resolution in accordance with their respective mandates.

3. Pursuant to resolution 1612 (2005), the Chairman of the Working Group submitted reports to the Council on developments in relation to the Working Group for the periods from 1 July 2005 to 30 June 2006 (S/2006/497), from 1 July 2006 to 30 June 2007 (S/2007/428) and from 1 July 2007 to 30 June 2008 (S/2008/455). Since the issuance of the latter report, the Working Group has held five formal meetings, on 25 July, 5 September, 14 November and 19 December 2008 and on 24 February 2009.

4. On 1 January 2009 the chairmanship of the Working Group was transferred from France to Mexico.

II. Substantive issues addressed

16th meeting

5. At its 16th meeting, on 25 July 2008, the Working Group adopted conclusions with respect to the report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Myanmar (S/2007/266). Those conclusions were published as document S/AC.51/2008/8. The Chairman of the Working Group then carried out the tasks entrusted to him in the context of those conclusions, including by drawing the attention of the Security Council to the need to follow up on the recommendations addressed to it.

6. The Working Group discussed the report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Uganda (S/2008/409). The Special Representative of the

Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Radhika Coomaraswamy, introduced the report and recalled its main conclusions:

(a) The United Nations country team was not able to confirm that all children and women abducted or recruited into the ranks of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) had been released, as stated by a delegation of that group;

(b) LRA should provide immediately a list of the names and ages of all children and women remaining in its ranks;

(c) The violations committed by LRA in Uganda had decreased because the group was operating elsewhere (southern Sudan, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Central African Republic), where grave violations had been reported;

(d) The Government of Uganda was thanked for its continuous cooperation and the establishment of an action plan.

7. The Representative of Uganda presented the point of view of her Government. The Working Group then held an exchange of views and, following the discussion, the experts were given the task of negotiating draft conclusions of the Working Group that would provide concrete follow-up to the Secretary-General's report.

8. The main elements of the statement made by the representative of the State concerned and of the exchange of views among the members of the Group are reflected in the summary contained in the conclusions subsequently adopted by the Working Group at its 18th meeting (S/AC.51/2008/13).

9. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General reported to the Working Group on her visits to Afghanistan, the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

17th meeting

10. At its 17th meeting, on 5 September 2008, the Working Group adopted conclusions with respect to the report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Sri Lanka (S/2007/758) and in the Philippines (S/2008/272). Those conclusions were published as documents S/AC.51/2008/10 and S/AC.51/2008/11, respectively. The Chairman of the Working Group then carried out the tasks entrusted to him in the context of those conclusions, including by drawing the attention of the Security Council to the need to follow up on the recommendations addressed to it.

11. The Working Group discussed the report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Chad (S/2008/532). The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict introduced the Secretary-General's report and recalled its main conclusions:

(a) Little had changed since the last report of the Secretary-General: recruitment and use of children by all parties to the conflict had been reported throughout the year;

(b) The recruitment and use of children in Chad was also related to the regional dimension of the conflict, with Sudanese armed groups recruiting children inside Chadian territory including in and around refugee camps;

(c) The Chadian authorities should fulfil their responsibility to protect girls, the main victims of rape and other sexual violence, fight against impunity for the perpetrators and provide girls with the required assistance;

(d) Chad was among the most affected countries in the world in terms of victims of landmines and unexploded ordnance;

(e) A significant number of incidents targeting humanitarian personnel and assets by parties to the conflict had been reported.

12. The Permanent Representative of Chad presented the point of view of his Government. The Working Group then held an exchange of views and, following the discussion, the experts were given the task of negotiating draft conclusions of the Working Group that would provide concrete follow-up to the Secretary-General's report.

13. The main elements of the statement made by the representative of the State concerned and of the exchange of views among the members of the Group are reflected in the summary contained in the conclusions subsequently adopted by the Working Group at its 18th meeting (S/AC.51/2008/15).

14. Hilde Johnson, Deputy Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), then presented the Secretary-General's "horizontal note", placing particular emphasis on the situation of children in Sri Lanka, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Georgia:

(a) In Sri Lanka, the escalation of the conflict had led to a substantial deterioration of the security situation, particularly in the north, impeding the operations and safe access to children by humanitarian actors;

(b) In Côte d'Ivoire, which was no longer officially on the Working Group's work plan owing to the cessation of reports of child recruitment, other grave violations continued to be perpetrated against children, in particular killing and maiming as well as rape and other sexual violence;

(c) In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, grave violations against children continued to take place, especially in North and South Kivu and Province Orientale. The main perpetrators of those violations included the following armed groups: Congrès national pour la défense du peuple, Forces democratiques de liberation du Rwanda, Coalition des patriotes résistants congolais and other Mai Mai groups, as well as Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (integrated and non-integrated brigades) and the Congolese National Police. Rape and other sexual violence continued to be a grave concern;

(d) The situation in Georgia, especially regarding the lack of access for humanitarian agencies to South Ossetia and its surrounding security zone, was worrying.

18th meeting

15. At its 18th meeting, on 14 November 2008, the Working Group adopted conclusions with respect to the reports of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Nepal, Uganda, Somalia and Chad (S/2008/259, S/2008/409, S/2008/352 and S/2008/532). Those conclusions were published as documents S/AC.51/2008/12, S/AC.51/2008/13, S/AC.51/2008/14 and S/AC.51/2008/15,

respectively. The Chairman of the Working Group then carried out the tasks entrusted to him in the context of those conclusions, including by drawing the attention of the Security Council to the need to follow up on the recommendations addressed to it.

19th meeting

16. At its 19th meeting, on 19 December 2008, the Working Group discussed the report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (S/2008/693). The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict introduced the report and recalled its main conclusions:

(a) Despite the engagement of the Council and the extensive work of United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations, the situation for children in the Democratic Republic of the Congo remained catastrophic;

(b) The re-ignition of conflict in the past several months was a subject of deep concern;

(c) Efforts to fight impunity had to be redoubled, taking into account the widespread sexual violence against girls and boys;

(d) The regional dimension of the conflict implied the necessity for the States concerned to enhance their cooperation;

(e) Long-term development strategies and the allocation of appropriate funds to support the efforts of UNICEF and child protection partners on the ground were necessary.

17. The Permanent Representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo presented the point of view of his Government. The Working Group then held an exchange of views and, following the discussion, the experts were given the task of negotiating draft conclusions of the Working Group that would provide concrete follow-up to the Secretary-General's report.

18. The main elements of the statement made by the representative of the State concerned and of the exchange of views among the members of the Group are reflected in the summary contained in the conclusions subsequently adopted by the Working Group at its 21st meeting, on 1 July 2009 (S/AC.51/2009/3).

19. Also at its 19th meeting, the Working Group discussed the report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Afghanistan (S/2008/695). The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict introduced the report and recalled its main conclusions:

(a) The deterioration of the security situation in Afghanistan had resulted in a growing number of children associated with armed groups including the Taliban, who used them increasingly as suicide bombers;

(b) Numerous attacks on schools by the Taliban and its proxies had resulted in over 230 schools being attacked in a one-year period;

(c) The use of children by the armed groups had also led to an increase in the detention of children by both the Afghan security forces and the international military forces;

(d) The killing and maiming of children continued to be a significant problem;

(e) Sexual violence remained a problem primarily for boys, through the practice of *bacha baazi* where young boys are taken in and sexually exploited while also providing entertainment for commanders and warlords;

(f) Impunity remained a major problem;

(g) The situation for children required a concerted international response, in particular the strengthening of the United Nations country team;

(h) The first child protection adviser to the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan had been assigned.

20. The Permanent Representative of Afghanistan presented the point of view of his Government. The Working Group then held an exchange of views and, following the discussion, the experts were given the task of negotiating draft conclusions of the Working Group that would provide concrete follow-up to the Secretary-General's report.

21. The main elements of the statement made by the representative of the State concerned and of the exchange of views among the members of the Group are reflected in the summary contained in the conclusions subsequently adopted by the Working Group at its 21st meeting, on 1 July 2009 (S/AC.51/2009/1).

22. Louis Georges Arsenault, Deputy Executive Director and Director of the Office of Emergency Programmes of UNICEF, then presented the Secretary-General's "horizontal note", placing particular emphasis on the situation of children in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Sudan:

(a) In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the situation in the east had significantly deteriorated. All parties to the conflict were reported to be recruiting children, including through mass recruitment drives, rendering the 33,000 children already released in the past years particularly vulnerable to re-recruitment;

(b) In the Sudan, children continued to be associated with armed groups in southern Sudan and in the Three Areas (Abyei, Blue Nile State and Southern Kordofan/Nuba Mountains). In Darfur, recent reports mentioned children being associated with Chadian armed opposition groups, especially in West Darfur.

23. At the same meeting, with respect to the issue of working methods, the Working Group received an answer to its letter dated 5 September 2008 addressed to the Chairman of the Informal Working Group on Documentation and Other Procedural Questions. That letter, dated 18 December 2008, included three sets of answers regarding Secretariat involvement in support of subsidiary bodies and working groups of the Security Council, the consultation process and the modalities of creation, by each body, of its own working methods.

20th meeting

24. At its 20th meeting, on 24 February 2009, the Working Group discussed the report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in the Central African Republic (S/2009/66). The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict introduced the report and recalled its main conclusions:

(a) The first report on the Central African Republic highlighted the fact that children had been consistently recruited and used by non-State armed groups, including Government-backed self-defence militias, and showed trends of rape and other grave sexual violence perpetrated by all parties to the conflict throughout the territory;

(b) The report noted the use of abductions, especially in the north-west, by non-State armed groups and armed bandits as a means of recruiting children and to threaten and extort ransom from the population;

(c) The report acknowledged the significant challenges in addressing grave violations against children in the Central African Republic and outlined a series of recommendations to put an end to those violations.

25. The Permanent Representative of the Central African Republic presented the point of view of his Government. The Group then held an exchange of views and, following the discussion, the experts were given the task of negotiating draft conclusions of the Group that would provide concrete follow-up to the Secretary-General's report.

26. The main elements of the statement made by the representative of the State concerned and of the exchange of views among the members of the Group are reflected in the summary contained in the conclusions subsequently adopted by the Working Group at its 21st meeting on 1 July 2009 (S/AC.51/2009/2).

27. At its 20th meeting, the Working Group also discussed the report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in the Sudan (S/2009/84). The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict introduced the report and recalled its main conclusions:

(a) The third report highlighted important ongoing initiatives by the Government of National Unity and the Government of Southern Sudan in areas such as adoption of national legislation for the protection of children, establishment of child protection modalities in the national police force and focus on children in the national disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process;

(b) The report showed that children continued to be recruited and used by all parties to the conflict, that rape and sexual violence continued to be systematic and widespread and that children and women in and around refugee camps and internally displaced persons' settlements were especially vulnerable;

(c) The report also showed alarming levels of attacks against humanitarian personnel and assets, particularly in Darfur, and the denial of humanitarian access to affected populations mainly owing to acute insecurity;

(d) The report noted limited progress in establishing child protection dialogue with parties to the conflict.

28. The Permanent Representative of the Sudan presented the point of view of his Government. The Working Group then held an exchange of views and, following the discussion, the experts were given the task of negotiating draft conclusions of the Working Group that would provide concrete follow-up to the Secretary-General's report.

29. The main elements of the statement made by the representative of the State concerned and of the exchange of views among the members of the Group will be

reflected in the summary contained in the conclusions to be formally adopted by the Working Group at its next meeting.

30. Monika Sandvik-Nylund, Advocacy and Policy Specialist of UNICEF, presented the Secretary-General's "horizontal note", placing particular emphasis on the situation of Sri Lanka and Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory:

(a) In Sri Lanka, the security situation in the north and east of the country continued to deteriorate, adversely affecting the protection, survival and development of children. Lack of access impeded the ability of victims and their families to report child rights violations and of the United Nations to effectively verify child rights violations in the Vanni and conflict-affected Government-controlled areas. The resumption of open fighting particularly in the Vanni increased the risk of children being killed, maimed and made vulnerable to other forms of exploitation and abuse by all parties to the conflict;

(b) In Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory the rapid deterioration in the seriousness of the conflict had resulted in intolerable consequences for children. That specific issue had been addressed by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict in the frame of her visit to Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

31. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict briefed the Working Group on her visit to Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, stressing the importance of improving the accountability process and of access for humanitarian assistance. A written report would be presented to the Human Rights Council.

Debate on children and armed conflict

32. On 29 April 2009 the Security Council held an open debate on children and armed conflict, which was chaired by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Mexico, Patricia Espinosa Cantellano, and attended by the Secretary-General, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, the Executive Director of UNICEF and Grace Akallo, a former child soldier from Uganda.

33. At the end of the open debate, the Security Council adopted a presidential statement on this matter (S/PRST/2009/9).